

# *In the Face of the West Wind*

*T. F. Gullixson*

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By  
T. F. GULLIXSON



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## *Dedication*

*Days long since hid in memory appear,  
Through rifts in scudding clouds—  
There, through the mists a host  
Of faces, forms that peopled distant scenes!  
They come, they go, fade out and reappear.  
They smile at me and whisper tenderly  
About those other years.*

To that host of faces this little book is dedicated.

I see them now, brave men and braver women, eyes front to all that need be to make a good life in a strange new land. Toilers in the harvest fields, sweat streaks gathering dust and rust, hands caloused from plow-handles and pitchfork, scarred by thorny weeds in harsh grain-bundles; and their women folk beside them or in their homes about endless tasks—household conveniences as yet un-invented. All, men and women, young and old, busy from sunup till beyond sundown, uncomplaining in their fellowship of toil.

Come Sunday at the white church, their horses fly-brushing at the long hitch-rack, I hear the slow cadence of their hymns and the voice of their minister. I listen in again to the clusters lingering long about the church door as they hear and tell of success or failure, of joy or sorrow, of fear and hope and faith.

I see their little towns and those who served them there—the storekeeper, the blacksmith, the harness-maker, the banker, the doctor climbing into his well-traveled buggy.

A generation later I see their children—grown, seeking a life of their own, after the parent pattern, seeking a homestead and a home farther west, much farther west.

Out there are young faces in the doorways of tar-paper houses and children peering out of the window.

There too came the pastors, my brothers, driving tired horses over long, winding prairie roads, summoning all to the hearing of the Word from God.

To these all I dedicate the following pages, a brief distillation from life lived among them. It was their life I shared; their loyalties which encouraged me; their faiths, ideals, and integrities which built up congregations, moulded communities, and sustained hopes and endeavors.

Such ideals, integrities, and sustaining faith must not pass away if all is to be well with America.

*Beside me as we lived among those westward-facing folks was one who long ago put hand in mine to say: "Yes, I will walk with you my lad; yes I will walk with you."*

*And she did.*

*To her among those faces from the past I need only whisper: "I remember."*

T. F. GULLIXSON





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## West Winds and Men and Nations

West winds have played a mighty role in the making of men and of history. Winds out of the west-northwest tossed the Spanish Armada onto the mud banks of Flanders and harassed the remnants of the great fleet around the British Isles, sending it back to Spain in battered shame, while England went on her turbulent way to empire.

Holland refused to be defeated by wind and tide but fought back with sea wall and dike, building not only a homeland but a national character for her citizens.

West winds brought the trading ships scudding homeward from ports around the world—home to all North Europe, there to build up giant enterprises in the world of commerce.

No one knows those winds better than the people from the fjords and cliffs of Norway. Even now

their rowboats boast the lifted prows and sterns of Viking ships—lines that helped those sturdy riders of the sea to climb the mountainous waves engendered when the northwest winds challenged the granite cliffs of Norway.

The fisher-folk, the sailor families, yea the temper of the whole people was moulded by the gentle winds and the wild storms that came off the Atlantic.

There is a song of the sea called “Westerly Weather” that used to be in the repertoire of Norse male choruses. It tells first of kindly winds breezing in across sun-bathed sands to caress the cheeks of little children playing on the moors or to waft along the midsummer laughter of maidens and their swains.

But the mood of the song suddenly changes:

*Clouded and black by day and night;  
Hailstorms and shredded spume;  
Towering breakers o'er every reef;  
Heaven-high seas that roar and crash!  
Dark dreams of judgment day—  
Quick decision, heroic rescue,  
Thanks of the saved—and widows' tears!  
West Wind!*

Folks thus tutored were not afraid of the immigrant ship; nor were they entirely unprepared for what awaited them as pioneers on the prairies. When the homesteads, snug and sheltered among



the hills of Wisconsin, were all taken, the home-seeker must push into the beyond. And beyond the hills, beyond the refuge of the woods, he became aware again of the wind in his face, the tireless wind, the west wind—though he did not learn at once all that this wind had to offer in a new land.

## Toward the Open Prairies

She stood, as that hard day of bereavement drew to its close, leaning on her cane alone by the westward kitchen door.

The setting sun, across the willow hedges and the maple groves, broke through the edges of a cloud and sent a long, bright ray like a vesper benediction upon a lonely old heart.

As she looked, the hedges seemed to disappear and the groves were gone; cornfields reverted to prairie grasses; and the fowl of the barnyard were drumming grouse on a hilltop or wild geese honking home across the marshes. The years went from her, and she saw again the sunset gleam on the weather-beaten canvas over the bows of an immigrant wagon and glow upon the face of her young partner of the trail.

Up and away from the night camps on the rises

above the Mississippi river bottoms went the westward trails where each wagon made its contribution to a great American epic—wheel tracks in the prairie grass.

Traces in the grass were turning to the right and to the left, off the main roads from all the river crossings between St. Louis and St. Anthony Falls.

Just a woman with a babe on either arm—how could she have known then of the multitudes who would follow, or of those who had gone before; or be able to visualize the tracery of trails and tracks, of roads and ruts spreading over the plain in making this epic.

But she did know that in her own family life this river crossing had indeed been a transition.

The long, winding pull up out of the bottomland along the Mississippi river was ended, and she and her husband had found themselves with the open country spread wide before them and sunset an hour or two away. The grassy plateau where they paused to rest the oxen and the horses was a place of vision. The ribbon of the river unwound among wooded slopes, all the more beautiful now as the declining sun ran its tracteries of light and shadow over the Iowa hills.

Her wishes usually had not been intruded into the issue of the day's mileage; but now an inner

urge moved her to crave the boon of a night camp here. Here above the Crossing, where the past and the future saluted each other and parted!

In her spiritual priesthood she would keep the vesper hour and the morning watch between the gentle glow of past memories and the bright beckoning fire of hope for the future.

In compliance with her wish, the camp was quickly made, the simple evening meal was finished, and she sat long beside her husband looking toward their future. The west wind off the miles of prairie grass and flowers caressed them as they sat. When dusk drew its curtain closer across the scene she moved to the brink of the hill alone and looked eastward into the gathering blue of coming night. The husband stood aloof. Of fine intuition; he had long sensed in his young wife this strange communion with the unseen—something that made him think of priests before high altars, or prophets standing on knolls apart, lifting up eyes unto the hills.

Her gaze did not waver while night came swiftly on. She held the contour of the eastward bluffs, for they were symbolic of all that had been there beyond the crossed barrier—the river.

A pale moon took up the vigil, and she went to her rest under the canvas of the wagon. But sleep would not come; she must look out; she must look



east. While her man and her babies slept, she kept vigil. She adjusted her pillow so that her eyes might still look toward that which no longer could be seen—that which had been.

Back there was the home of her childhood, wide land and wider ocean between. Birthplace and girlhood's memories were there; the long, long voyage—sixty days on the angry ocean. The heavy dread, the persisting anxieties of the immigrant girl making her way, a stranger in a strange land! She saw herself all a-tremble before the fine Yankee matron who had agreed to give the little "newcomer" a trial, and her eyes misted even in the night at the memory of kindnesses in that home.

She saw her love come by, straight and tall. He walked into her life with the bravado and bearing of a sea warrior out of her homeland's sagas.

She saw clearly the little log house on the wooded Wisconsin "forty" that had been theirs. Was it not built for her, designed according to her taste in log cabins? She could hear the rhythm of his ax working among the trees. She could discern his love in the grubbing, the wrestling with stubborn oak and hickory roots; in the slow, grinding, back-breaking toil with spade and grub hoe.

Then came news from the West of homesteads on open grasslands, with better hopes for the

future of her children. Difficult decisions; quick sale; preparations; farewells; the westward journey; the joy of hope.

In profound thankfulness to the God of Abraham, who had again called his humble children westward, she fell asleep.

There was no dallying in the morning. The camp fire was crackling. The water for the breakfast mush was on, and as she stepped down to take her place at the fire, she could hear the music in the milk pail, snare drum music to begin with, soon muted and subdued as the foam-crowned milk rose toward the top of the pail. Theirs was a traveling dairy. Milk, cream, butter, would walk beside their wagons on the legs of the two contented cows of the caravan.

The haze was lifting off the river. Soon the eastward bluffs would stand clearly in view again; but now her back was toward the east—she was looking west and waited only the road ahead. In her heart was the song, "Where God doth lead me I will go."

Those who went forth to face the prairie wind as my parents did encountered a force of many faces, of many moods. Sometimes as gentle as a maiden's caress, again as brutal as a rampaging monster; sometimes bearing sunshine and the promise of spring, again blackness and the doom

of hurricane and hail; sometimes cool against the cheek and gentle with the growing grain, sometimes a strong sirocco from a desert blasting a summer's work in a day; sometimes wafting little clouds to ride their shadows in bright sunshine across the hills; sometimes coming down out of the icy vastnesses of the north with death riding its blizzard wings to steal warmth from the body and breath from the nostrils; to drive the racing streaks of snow over highways, over railroad, over barns and houses, over countryside and town, till half a state lay helpless.

To face the west winds was to challenge nature in all her moods.

It was a noble breed that went out to meet that challenge. They say, "There's no mistaking the man who has lived with the sea." The same is true of the man who really has lived with the prairies and faced the west winds. Winds mold more than snowdrifts and sand dunes. They mold lives and mark character.

## The Sisterhood of the Unafraid

The distances were vast out yonder where the west wind comes from; the neighbors at the outset were far away; the nights were long and dark when no single twinkling lamp from other human habitation could be glimpsed; the dangers in winter, and in summer, too, were many. Whence, then, came the boldness to set up there the abode of the sisterhood of the unafraid?

Heroes do not boast of the absence of fear. Knowing it full well with its chill and trembling, they override it and go on to duty. Motherhood in nature does the same thing. The plover in the summer grass must have been frightened indeed of the barefooted intruder who came upon her nest. You could see her fear as she fluttered away, keeping just out of reach, feigning a broken wing in order to draw the man away. Risking capture,



she put on a pathetic performance of a helpless cripple until, step by step, the intruder was lured away. The mother grouse, with new-hatched chicks under her bosom, fanning away with her wings the creeping flames in the upland grass around her nest, must have known terrible fear as she stayed and won, or died. The barnyard hen just around the granary corner, crouching in front of her bewildered chicks, with wings extended and beak at the ready, keeping watch between her brood and a great king snake, must have known all the terrors of fear. Yet there she stood undaunted.

“Love casts out fear.” Perhaps one could say that of these feathered creatures in their motherhood. Of the human sisterhood of the unafraid we can say, “Love and hope and faith stand together against fear.” Thousands of women were of that frontier band. Two of them now come to mind, widely separated as to geography and chronology but kindred in spirit. (See Chapter VIII “No Physician There.”)

In 1865 north-central Iowa was wide open space, with possibilities enough to make anyone afraid, especially wives and mothers, and among them my mother.

Here, in the midst of the vast prairie, the newcomers set up their homes. It was a ten-by-twelve-

foot cabin, built of rough-sawn, unseasoned, unpainted oak, subject to warping and shrinkage in summer heat and freezing cold. A home, this, for two babies, a husband, a brother, and herself! The little house had been skidded from its original site across some seven miles of grassland and placed on a few flat stones from the prairie. The walls were banked up with wide strips of sod against the coming winter—a banking which was to freeze solid and draw away from the wallboards.

The problem of keeping warm in the blasts of blizzard winds became a terrifying one.

With menfolks away on a seven-mile trip to the woods for fuel, a fierce snowstorm with stinging winds and cold besieged the cabin. How to keep the babies warm, with the snow and cold blowing in through creaking walls? Pray? Yes; but it was of no use to wring one's hands and cry. Cornmeal was at hand and snow water; so a large kettle of thick corn mush was cooked, and gobs of it were held against the worst cracks, till the bitter wind shut itself out with frozen mush for plaster. Then came the two or three days of waiting to learn whether the wood haulers had survived in so fierce a storm.

Survival became the issue not only for human beings, but for horses, oxen, cows, surrounded in their poor shelters by a sea of snow, the constant

playing field of varying winds. Each new storm raised the question whether the little haystack gathered so laboriously by scythe, hand rake, and pitchfork, would bring the animals through alive into spring.

With the spring came the hazard of fire, if the dried grass had not been burned off in the fall. There were, of course, firebreaks around the house and barn, almost the first thought of the settler on the prairies. Two or three furrows of sod were plowed around the homestead, with another row of furrows in a second circle two or three rods beyond. Then on the right windless day all the grass between the furrows was burned to blackness. But would the firebreak be wide enough? From what direction might the fire come, and how strong would the wind be that would bring it? It is hard now to realize that across the level uplands there was blue-joint grass so tall that half-grown children could not see above it, and that over the moist lowland were masses of reeds and slough grasses so high that even a man on horseback could not always be seen. Fire rolling through such masses of dry growth was like oncoming doom. With such a threat rolling in, the safest place appeared to be the few acres of plowed field. There, on one occasion, stood the young pioneer wife, her babies clinging to her skirt, and around each wrist the

halter rope of a horse too frightened to have the sense to stay on the plowing. What a vision of devotion triumphing over fear as the flames rolled by on either side!

With the fire season past, came the time of the summer storms—rain and hail and especially thunderstorms. Mark Twain has written the one adequate description I know of the Mississippi Valley thunderstorm and its cannonading. Such storms are native to the region, and they thundered on as the years came and the family grew. When the eldest sons became cowboys herding the neighborhood stock across the unfenced open country, there was a mother's added anxiety for these young cattle men in fair or foul weather.

Between 1865 and my own childhood in the eighties, the rattlesnake had disappeared. I never saw one there. But in the beginning they were indeed a hazard; and it became a homesteader's rule whether he was on horseback or afoot, that they were to be destroyed wherever they were encountered. The rattlers did not call on men alone. Our mother, whom I count among the unafraid, kept a well-sharpened hoe leaning near the cabin door for emergencies. There must be continual watchfulness over one's own footsteps, watchfulness over the children, anxiety for the men haying or harvesting and binding the grain by hand. The



dry hissing of the rattler was always a threatening possibility. Why did a woman not run away from it all, after seeing a full grown rattler sliding across the floor toward the woodbox while she was dressing in the lean-to on a Sunday morning? Why did she not give way to hysteria and flight when she looked outside the cabin door to discover that what was delighting her baby daughter so much was a coiled rattler following the child's pointed finger with its own pointed head darting back and forth as though charmed? There was need for the sharpened hoe by the door and for enough love and loyalty to override fear.

There were health hazards, too, with the nearest doctor a score of miles away. When a violent attack of stomach cramps overtook the young husband, and the agony of death seemed creeping up, what was there to do but to send the two little girls alone through the dark along a pathway to a neighbor's house to ask him to ride for the doctor, and for the wife to be nurse and physician and spiritual counselor, alone in the prairie silence? The lids from the top of the kitchen stove were wrapped in rags and applied to the pain-wracked body in lieu of hot-water bottle or heating pad. Then there were ailments, accidents, and epidemics to threaten the flock of children; and of course, from time to time, crises in the homes of neighbors to

enlist one's help and sympathy. There was the awesome death of a young sister-in-law from infection in childbirth. There was the trip through the prairie night to the bedside of a young mother awaiting her firstborn, a service so much appreciated that fifty years later in a city far away this same mother sought out the youngest son of her benefactor to express her gratitude.

Over all those first dozen years hung the fear of failure, of self-indictment for having left the compact settlements to the east for the hazards of this exposed landscape where half of the first twelve harvests had been total failures from hail or drouth or grasshoppers or unthreshed grain rotting in the fields. Why did my mother veto the passionate suggestion of her husband that they leave these discouragements and return to the gentle hills of Wisconsin? "No, we have lost what we had right here, and we will stay until we find it." She was of the sisterhood of the unafraid. Many years later, while discussing the women in Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth*, her son was to ask if the empty land had affected her in the same way. Mother answered with reminiscent smile, "No, I always liked the prairies."

## The Breeze with Benediction

In a profound religious problem the Apostle Paul interjects these words as he writes to the Romans: "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God."

He who has lived with the winds of the Great Plains has often seen the same thing. He has faced the severity of God riding down from the West with searing summer heat, or bearing the death-dealing cold of a blizzard. More often the goodness of God has caressed his face and blessed his home with breezes like a benediction.

Warm winds rushing through the mountains may bring disaster in avalanche and flood; but the same winds blowing across the snow-bound plains bring release and hopeful anticipation.

West winds and bright sunshine! What could the snowbanks of a long winter do against such a

combination? What warnings and prohibitions could hold a small boy back from the urge to be close to this marvel of liberation? Little trickles of bright water came down from the very eaves of his home and sought out other trickles coming out of snowbanks in the dooryard. Together they hastened away in a gurgling little stream that laughed and beckoned as it hurried on. Soon boy and stream were running down the road to where a half-clogged culvert offered an interesting engineering problem, after which an incipient lake disappeared with a gurgling rush of waters under the road and down the little ravine. All the while the west-by-south wind blew and the sun shone; the snow melted and the waters came down till each slough became a lake, and the lowlands a chain of lakes. While the west wind caressed the sandy knolls, the crocuses and the buttercups would be peeping up. The ducks, too, were out riding the wind; for they knew that its warmth would clear the fields for hungry mallards; would soon unlock the food supplies of the frozen marshes for the puddle ducks and roll back the ice into windrows on the beaches for the diving canvasback and redheads; and finally, would give courage to the north-bound triangles of geese to follow their inner urge toward the vastness of the frozen north. The grouse would be drumming,

the gophers whistling on the hilltops, for spring had come.

A small boy with very wet feet would have to face an accounting for being remiss about warnings and prohibitions; but what could I do when the west wind and the warm sun had issued a joint emancipation proclamation?

This breeze of blessing is not just a plaything for boys and their dreams in spring. A west wind is a thing of man-size importance on the wide sweep of the Great Plains.

And again memory carries me back to 1912 and a preaching mission among the settlers along the Missouri and the Milk River Valley in northern Montana. The settlements were new, and life could be grim. It was late in March just before Holy Week. Appointments in five different places brought me into contact with those who had lived for months with the bawlings and the bleatings of starving cattle and sheep. The snow had been deep and persistent. Supplies of hay and fodder, meager at best, were exhausted. Sheep, gnawing buck-brush, were killing themselves. There seemed to be no hope.

Then came a southwest wind — unheralded, quietly. Though the sun behind the haze seemed to have little power, the chinook took over. Soon bare spots appeared on the slopes, soon waters



were cascading down the draws, cattle were basking on the sunny knolls, and sheep were cropping the rich treasures of the buffalo grass to get a hold on life again. At the end of my mission, as I watched the last of the snow turn to slush and the slush to water, I could but wonder at the fresh hope of the good folks who had so recently gathered with me for worship while anxiety had crowded reverence in their hearts. I could see in my mind's eye the dragging steps of starved sheep and gaunt cattle as they reached for the bleached grasses that meant life.

A chinook on the plains can be a wonderful thing, indeed a breeze of blessing.

But the winds of the prairie have more to offer than emancipation from the bonds of winter; they have spring work to do. How welcome the warm west wind is to the impatient farmer waiting till muddy swales become tillable fields ready for his seeding machinery! Can anyone who has lived close to the fields of the Great Plains, ever forget the billowing of the heading grain as the kind winds assist in its pollination, in its absorption of the sunshine, in fending off black rust, in filling and ripening each head of wheat?

Up from the South in summer comes the gulf breeze at evening to bring comfort to Texan nights; off the oceans, east and west, come night

winds to drive away the discomforts of summer days. The northern plains also know their vesper benedictions in the coolness that creeps across the land at evening.

One wonders what the lone broncho finds when he seeks the top of a prairie knoll, or stands silhouetted against the sky on some tall butte as the heat of the day subsides. It must be the wind caressing his flanks and fluttering his mane; for who would accuse a horse of just meditating or dreaming or admiring the scenery? Still, the evening view from the top of a butte is entrancing!

## Westward Ho!

Early in the 1900's the call came to me for a ministry centering in the little city of Pierre, nestled beside the Missouri, the great river of the plains. Situated well toward the center of South Dakota's wide open spaces it was already the capital of the state. Just across the river a large Indian reservation had been opened to settlement.

Bright hopes were beckoning a new generation of homesteaders, and their little houses, usually covered with tarpaper, dotted the benchland and the hillsides. Their hopes stirred other hopes for communities to be, with near neighbors and schools and churches after the pattern of counties and states farther east. These settlements were the westward part of my field. As much of them as I could cover was mine. I was free to roam and reach and seek.

And the west winds were blowing. They had

been blowing as was revealed through contacts with remnants of congregations which had been and were gone. Homesteaders had come a score of years earlier toward the near side of the river with bright hopes of duplicating the achievements of still earlier homesteaders in the Mississippi valley. Most of them were gone. Too much hot, dry, west wind! A strange experience this, to go toward the east seeking remnants of congregations that had been, then to seek out clusters of the west river homesteaders with their faces turned confidently toward what was to be, what must be; to come away from officiating at the first grave on a carefully selected spot above the creek where a church was to be built, then to visit a little knoll some fifty miles to the east where weeds and tangled barbed-wire, and a few neglected graves marked what once had been the center of a settlement fondly and earnestly expectant of a future.

The city between was buffeted by the past and beckoned by the future. Survey stakes for streets and alleys and building plots were still standing in the prairie grass two or three miles from the main street, memorials of a boom. The ruins of a college building stood in mute witness to hopes that had flourished and died.

Now a flood of immigrants were at the crossing. A railroad was bridging the river reaching west-

ward. Expectation was rampant again. Plans for the future reached far. May one who knew them pay tribute to some he knew, who saw plainly the possibilities that are now being realized in the great Oahe Dam on the Missouri River. These men were sure and proclaimed their certainty in many a group meeting, though they knew nothing of the giant earth-moving machinery and the engineering which has now made possible man's control of the mad Missouri.

The past and the future clashed as to what the west winds would do. The old Indian who carefully turned back into the furrow, the buffalo-grass sod behind the homesteaders' breaking plow with the words, "The grass side is the right side up," was backed by his own experience and by the insistence of the cow-man's assertion, "A homestead with 160 acres will keep seven cows alive through a year."

But the land-agents, and the claim-locaters, optimists, told the homesteaders, who were only too anxious to believe, "Break up the land, plant it, cultivate it, and cultivation will bring moisture." The optimists prevailed. The reservation was filled, homestead shacks appeared four to a section.

"Government is a minister of God to you for good," says the Bible; but our national leaders



were not good to these folks sixty years ago in furthering the idea that 160 acres of west-river land would make a future home and a living out of a homestead. The hot winds continued to blow. Still, it was good to be there with these folks even though their hopes soon dimmed.

In a ministry which touched points as far as 100 miles to the east (encouraging and revitalizing church-work established but neglected) and 75 miles to the west and northwest, seeking out clusters of people of my faith, transportation was of great concern. Eastward, reliance was largely on regular train service, passenger and way-freights. Westward, the railroad bridge over the Missouri was not completed when my ministry began, but the track was in, and work trains were operating and could occasionally be used. There were a few shorter stage lines which helped a bit. Then there was the wide and very long Deadwood Trail reaching around the knolls and over the range all the way to the Black Hills. Here the saddle horse and the freight wagon predominated. My few trips, made with a borrowed horse and buggy, were uneventful except for stops to eat at so-called "road-ranches." But soaking rains turned the gumbo soil into powerful masses of adhesive which, when wheels were pressed down into it, would roll up on the rims in impossible masses.

Once on a very hilly stretch I walked up each hill, thus lightening the buggy so that the horse could pull it and then at the hilltop became the driver again, speeding the horse downward till the gumbo by centrifugal force was sent hurtling into the air—my anxiety then being not to get it in the neck.

A memory which has brought many a chuckle through these years is of a nooning at a road-ranch where teamsters, ranchers, homesteaders, agents, locaters, cowboys, and the like, were the regular guests. A company of many vocations! Having washed in one of the several tin basins on the long bench under the eaves, I drew up to the oilcloth-covered table beside a lanky plainsman who without delay got acquainted by asking, "Well, pardner, what's your graft?" No offense was meant and no offense was taken. It was just the friendliness of the western plains, the kind that called "howdy" to every traveler going by on the trail.

The Deadwood Trail of those days was not just one, but a wide series of wheel tracks, sometimes rods in width, with no fencing except that provided by ranch buildings. Its history stretched back into gold-rush days and naturally excited the imagination of those who journeyed over it. Evidently, as wagons had left their first traces in the

prairie grass and others followed them, the wheel tracks had become grooves worn deeper and deeper by the erosion of wind and water. When a track was too deep, one simply moved alongside it to another track. So it went, until the wide ribbon of little parallel ditches looked like the furrows of a giant tractor carelessly driven. This was the famed trail that beckoned the traveler over the hills toward the sunset.

The new railroad from Pierre to the Black Hills followed the Bad River westward. As the early dreams of the homesteaders vanished in the hot haze of rainless summers, it must have seemed like a bad dream indeed to the finance managers of the railroad company; but in the beginning its service, work trains, freight trains, and passenger coaches were surely welcome.

The stages I knew were not the romantic affairs of the TV Western, but just spring wagons, with some or few springs, and usually a canvas top against rain and a too-persistent sun. My first stage experience took me south to a settlement of fellow-Norskies some forty miles away. The special occasion was a Seventeenth of May festival. The many Norse families were gathered at the Hilmoie homestead for the program which featured my speech. Then came picnic lunches and in the afternoon a baseball game. Both speech

and game come vividly to mind. It became evident that there were some 100 percent Americans present who did not believe in Seventeenth of May speeches. Two of them, well-dressed middle-aged women, sat on the edge of the planks which constituted the speaker's platform. But their rigid backs were squarely toward the speaker, and when he began to talk they likewise began to discourse quite audibly with one another in definite competition. Admittedly, it was a trying situation! But the speaker began at once to direct his address squarely at the feminine backs which were challenging him. The frontiersmen soon sensed the humor of the situation, and their grins were the prelude to crimson blushes that shortly appeared around the necks of the unladylike members of the audience, as silence descended on that side of the platform. They told me later that a raw-boned Norse rancher of some standing in the area enjoyed the incident very much, as he was married to one of the women.

When the baseball game got under way an Indian in a horseman's garb went to the pitcher's mound. His pitching form indicated plainly that he had not acquired it throwing things at prairie dogs. A little visit with him revealed that he had played on the Carlyle Indian School team back in Pennsylvania.

The next day on the long return trip there was one stop, a road-ranch, "the only place to get a decent drink of water in forty miles," said the stage driver. At one spot a rattlesnake met us on the road. The driver gave me the heavy whip and said, "Kill it." It was quickly done; but there is something impressive about a rattler when he points his vicious head at you and increases the crescendo of his rattling. Afterward, I saw him in my sleep.

Three points on the railroad and on the Bad River left vivid memories—Van Metre, Midland, Philip. Up along two forks of one of the many creeks creasing the plain, at Van Metre, a compact settlement of Norse-Lutherans from Iowa. I was asked to take over from a brother pastor as coming train service would make it easier for me. Services were held in homesteaders' homes, once or twice in the Chicago-Northwestern depot waiting room, and then in a schoolhouse. Once on the seven-mile walk up the creek from Van Metre I sought to take a short-cut across a pasture. Not ignorant of the habits of range cattle, I kept as close to the fence as possible. But the herd spotted me—and no horse under me—so the rush started. The bulls of Bashan were doubtless fearsome creatures, but so are range cattle when investigating a man on foot. Thanks for a good, strong fence!



On one visit when the schedule of the east-bound work train was fairly well established, a family on the west fork of the creek requested my presence. It was a pleasure to serve them; but a specific advance agreement was reached that the man of the house would bring me to the station so that I should not miss the train. He kept his word. They were sociable folks. The husband especially was talkative and leisurely. Finally we were in his "buck-board" drawn by two bronchos. Behold, as we came over the hill above the depot the bell was ringing, and as we neared the depot the train was moving slowly down the track. Nothing daunted, my host drove his bronchos in pursuit along the right-of-way, using his whip and shouting at the train. Luckily for me the division superintendent, who was, for a season during bachelor days, my table mate at the excellent boarding house where I lived, had his special car attached to the train that day and saw the pursuit. He seemed to enjoy the sight of a somewhat shaken-up but thankful young preacher coming up over the rear end of his moving office!

The name Midland will always bring to mind an appointment to officiate at a wedding in a ranch home west of the town. Nestling under the great cottonwoods above the river with the white-faced cattle coming contentedly down from the buffalo

grass up on the bench, the place as we approached it in the evening light seemed the very symbol of happiness and peace. The owner was a widow who had brought her sons out from Chicago for a more promising life. She was an impressive personality, this quiet woman. The wedding was a happy occasion. Before my departure the next day she pointed to a little mound with flowers on it just outside the window near which her rocking-chair stood. She told me that there was the grave of her youngest son—shot at the door of a Midland tavern in the sequel to a drunken brawl. God pity all the mothers who must rock their way to the end with such remembrance.

Contact with the Lutherans of Philip, South Dakota, began with a wedding—the first of my ministry and a double wedding at that. It was performed in the little white church at Pierre, with just the two bridal couples acting as witnesses, each for the other, and the minister most nervous of all. They were pioneers in Philip, having established a general store. They told of numerous homesteaders of our faith and invited me to come to gather a congregation.

The Philip schoolhouse, where I was to hold services later, was under construction. The only room available was above a saloon, so we decided on a little willow grove, down by the river, for

our first service. A lovely spot it was, and all went well, except that across the road, a short distance away, a baseball game was in progress; and though my congregation was a loyal one, it was not easy when long hits were made, to hold the attention of my flock.

Northwest of Philip, at Grindstone Flats, was another point where worship services were held. Most attentive among the worshipers were the parents and elder children of a family that had not been able to worship in the mode and language of their hearts in seventeen years.

The most vivid memories along the Deadwood Trail have to do with a little group of Estonians. A few families had been able to get away from their homeland, then under the hard domination of the Czar of all the Russias. An earnest people they were, and almost every contact seems to have left an impression with me. A request came to the parsonage for my services at a wedding and at the baptism of children. A conveyance was to meet me at the ferry landing early one summer afternoon, and I found myself in a spring wagon side by side with a husky young man driving a pair of very spirited horses. We had been west-bound on the trail for an hour or two when the driver swung in before a sun-blistered store-front building where he gave me the reins and simply

said, "Hold the horses." They were held without much difficulty; but behold here came the driver carrying a box which was very evidently a case of beer. Disposing of this in the wagon, he soon came back again—this time with a large-size jug. What was in it, the minister never knew. But he could guess.

As we proceeded toward the sunset, my imagination started working. These Estonians had come out of Russia, Czarist Russia. Pictures of vodka-drinking Russians dancing in drunken carousel rose before my mind's eye as the probable sequel to this wedding. Little encouragement came from exploring the attitudes of my robust driver. He had been working on a railroad construction job in Montana and was dead sure that a little booze and accompanying fun did not hurt anybody. Prospects grew darker with each mile and with each glance at the setting sun. Shadows deepened as we drove up a little draw and stopped before a dugout near a number of low ranch buildings. A dugout in a side hill! What a setting for what was evidently impending! Booze and bedbugs!

The elderly head of the family met me at the door with a most gracious welcome. We entered the home through the kitchen—roomy, spotlessly clean. It was really a split-level home, that dugout on the prairies, and my real shock came when we

stepped down and entered the large living room. In one corner was a bed with the whitest, cleanest linen. Walls were white and richly decorated with needlework and with reprints of renowned paintings and engravings. One could only sit and look and wonder.

We were soon invited to supper and again stepped up to the kitchen. Only the men seemed to be seated then, with the father of the household at the head of the table. Large empty glasses were by each plate, indicating what was to be expected. After grace was said, the hostess filled the glass of the master of the house with beer, then came to my side. Determined to witness for temperance and self-control, I gently declined and to my astonishment all the other men at the table turned their glasses upside down. Such courtesy toward a guest I had never seen. Only the father at the head of the table had beer with his supper.

For the baptismal service, a few hymnbooks were at hand in my luggage. Though only the men, through their contacts in roundups and other business affairs, knew English, the women too crowded around two or three copies; and when the baptismal hymn was intoned they crowded still closer and tears began to trickle down their faces. Evidently the old Lutheran hymn was the same one used in their Estonian homeland. The



melody tied them in, though they could not read the words.

After the wedding service, a visit with the bride revealed a well-educated person speaking four languages, the sister of a newspaper editor in Estonia, whose life had been forfeited in the endless struggle for freedom from Russia.

Slumber came slowly that night. There was indeed the tinkle of glasses in the kitchen, but not the slightest indication of drunkenness. Sleep was hampered by the deep sense of shame for having misjudged so fine a group of people, and of thankfulness for the privilege of knowing them. After a few years of freedom, the hard hand of Russia swept down again over the Baltic nations; and many post-war refugees from Estonia are enriching American life by their presence here today.

A modest white house by a little white church in Pierre became the center of my ministries, reaching east and west and throughout the capital city itself. There my young wife learned in overflowing measure what was involved in living with a man who had a field too wide and a job too big. It was a time when proselyting programs on the part of certain American Protestants were at their height. The mass of Lutherans were then worshipping in the languages of their several overseas homelands, while their children were being edu-

cated in the English. Younger educated men and women, moving into American life and work more rapidly than their fellows, were constantly being urged to ignore the faith of their fathers as they were ignoring their language, and to cast their lot with faiths and programs supposedly more American. It was also an ordeal for the young wife to watch silently while her husband paced the floor pondering the never-ending problems of applying a conservative Lutheran pastoral practice on the frontiers of an all-English congregational work.

But though the winds of adversity often blew, how rewarding those years were!

## The Missouri

Wandering winds over the upper Great Plains area will all be rippling or roaring at the waters of the Missouri River.

Those who faced westward against the winds reckoned with that river. For some it was a highway to distant forts and trading posts; for some it was an escape route and amongst its sand bars and islands a hiding place; for animals and men in the eras of drouth it was an unfailing water supply. And what water!

In its muddy, murky self it hid the snow waters of the Madison, the Jefferson, the Gallatin, the Marias, the Yellowstone, to bring them all down across the prairies.

But the Missouri was also a barrier, and crossings were few and far between. Its boatmen and ferrymen were bold, venturesome souls; they needed to be.

A writer of verse, Lee Andrew Weber, says it:

### THE MISSOURI

*A dirty beggar lying in the sun,  
With work to do that's somehow never done.  
You claw with skinny hands at our front door  
And gulp and swallow, ever wanting more.*

*The thievish wind is picking at your tatters;  
He specks your mud-brown coat with dirty spatters;  
Your muscles do not bulge, and yet I feel  
Beneath your rags must be the strength of steel.*

*It's mild and plain enough—the way you came,  
Playing along, but in a wily game;  
And when I see your back humped round the bend,  
I wonder if you're enemy or friend.*

*A snarl of faggots, dregs, and dross—your load;  
And yet you carry Life off down your road.  
From you the more fastidious will shrink,  
But ever from your cup our life we drink.*

*Reclamation Era*, May 1946, carried this item:  
“Years ago a humorist said: There is only one river with a personality, a sense of humor and a woman’s caprice; a river that goes traveling sideways, that interferes with politics, re-arranges geography and dabbles in real estate; a river that plays hide-and-seek with you today, and tomorrow follows you around like a pet dog with a dynamite cracker tied to his tail. That river is the Missouri.”

I am glad to have known that river as it was and to have had a preview of the Missouri basin

that is to be. In July 1904, as a young seminarian, I first met the Missouri. It was near Vermillion, South Dakota, and the "June rise" was on with a vengeance. A mile-wide seethe of waters was racing and tumbling along. One of the river's "real estate transactions" was in progress, and a farmer was in turn racing the river to haul away his oat shocks from a fine alluvial bench that was being rentlessly undercut by the current to be deposited somewhere down stream, perhaps on the Nebraska side as a sand bar or mud flat. Human endeavors at control were futile—the river was on a rampage.

As a young clergyman, surveying the setting of his first parish, I met the Missouri again in May, 1907, at Pierre, South Dakota. The steel skeleton of a railroad bridge rested on piers that were making war against the rushing waters. Uprooted cottonwood trees came floating past, tossed like straws in the surging currents. Suddenly there appeared a dozen or more bloated cattle floating with their feet up, dead refuse on the bosom of a mighty river. No doubt, somewhere to the north, a snow-storm had drifted a herd over a break into some ravine. Spring thaws had swept snow and cattle into the river, and there they were going down around a bend of this mysterious Missouri.

Just before Palm Sunday in 1912, as a young

pastor on a home mission assignment seeking the settlers who had recently homesteaded in north-eastern Montana, I met the Missouri again—this time at Wolf Point, Montana.

The river seemed peaceful enough as we approached it, still locked in the ice of winter, though a chinook had been blowing over a vast reach of heavy snow. The ice pan just below the Indian trading post at Wolf Point showed a traveled road across the ice. But next to the bank there was a swift sweep of water caused by the heavy bond of frost between ice and embankment which made the ice surface there lower than that of the central pan. However, sharply shod horses kept our sledge from following the current, and we were soon across and through the heavy cottonwoods of the bottom land. After concluding a service of worship in the lone schoolhouse up on the South Bench, wise counsel prevailed against my attempting a return crossing in the night. In the meantime the chinook, warm from the southwest, blew on. There was no need for an alarm clock next morning. A very cannonade of cracking ice saluted the break of day. On the way toward the crossing of the evening before, we met the water coming up the road to meet us. It told its story.

A solid, flat-bottomed boat was placed in our



sledge with oars and a long rod for feeling out the ice. Then we made another approach to the river, this time at a wide expanse where the ice pan was still intact and had risen with the water. First came our embarkation and crossing to the ice pan, then a long haul of the boat across the ice with *the clergyman* going on before, using the steel rod to feel out the way through the light snow cover. Then came the launching of the boat from the ice pan for the final pull through open water where floating ice was to be fended off with more help from the steel rod. Then a friendly willow tree frozen solidly into the bank gave me the chance to climb to solid ground after tossing my ministerial baggage up. I had a long, prayerful watch as my friends and hosts made their way back across the open water, over the ice, and finally hauled their boat out and disappeared in the woods.

They had need of the boat, for later that week the river invaded their home and though in grave danger, they made their escape.

The Missouri was on a rampage. The chinook had done its work.

In September 1915 three men and a dog were proceeding from south to north across the range country some fifty miles west of Bismarck, North Dakota. Surveyed and sometimes graded roads ran east and west, but except for approaches to

the towns, wagon trails supplemented by cattle trails sufficed for our 1913 Model-T Ford. It was a most interesting trip taking us through an area peopled largely by Germans from South Russia, for instance, through the town of Krem. Leaving the wheat fields and pastures of the upper bench, we followed a well-traveled coulee road down to Manhaven, a shipping port on the Missouri. The railway had come up northwest from Mandan and went on west, but there was still a grain elevator and a market by the river bank at Manhaven, though quiet had settled over the place. A genial German-Russian took us in for the night and smiled us on our way in the morning. The road through the willows brought us abruptly to a ferryboat with its landing planks out, and a team and buggy already aboard. The ferryman bade us welcome and spotted our car for us just where he wanted it. The ferryboat was named *Clara*, and above the stern paddle wheel was painted "Port of Pembina." Evidently she had originally plied the Red River of the North. How she came to be a Missourian we never learned. Driven by a gasoline motor, she sidled across the river on a very pleasant trip. Confidence in the waters of the Missouri was indicated when we asked the skipper if he had any drinking water on board. He pointed to a tin can on a long string and said,

"Drop it into the river and let it settle a little." Brush had been cut and thrown for a mat on the sand of our landing place, or the spinning wheels of our brave little car would hardly have made it. With one backward glance, we were away from a pleasant contact with a smiling Missouri River.

This westward tributary of "Ol' Man River" can be gently beautiful when the summer's business of caring for the mountain snows of the winter is past and when the snow water of the prairies and occasional flash floods has gone on its way. Then she makes no war on her mud banks, ventures no earth-moving projects from sandbar to sandbar, but only smiles at you.

I remember a bright October day at a ranch on the bottom land a mile or two below the place where the great Garrison Dam has changed the geography of North Dakota. The pheasants were moving from the buck-brush up along the draws and slopes of the upper bench, toward the river and the water. But these wily birds were forgotten as I moved along a cattle trail among giant cottonwoods to visit the Missouri herself. And suddenly there she was, decorating an October day with her silver sheen and gently lapping wavelets, welcoming the golden leaves that were dropping on her bosom. Across on the other side a very riot of colors—gold and reds and browns—flared up over

the breaks to the benchland above. On this side glowed entrancing cottonwoods and over all brooded a silence unbroken. There she came, mysteriously, out of the west, around a bend, and far below, glittering in the noonday sun, she disappeared, still a mystery.

There was nothing to remind one that two miles up stream the government engineers were busily drilling test holes across the channel and up over the bluffs north and south so that the Garrison Dam-to-be might have firm foundations and suitable fill.

Now the Missouri River has been tamed. The Fort Peck Dam began some twenty years ago to restrain the waters of the upper Missouri, establishing a lake of mountain waters reaching 189 miles across Montana.

The lake behind the Garrison Dam is still rising. It will eventually be almost 200 miles long and in some places 15 to 20 miles wide.

Another great earthen dam is the Oahe, nearing completion six miles above Pierre, South Dakota. Its resulting lake will be some 250 miles long, reaching almost to Bismarck, North Dakota. Forty miles below Pierre, at Big Bend, is another, though smaller, dam whose lake will border Pierre on the south.

The Fort Randall reservoir will present a lake

110 miles long behind an earthen dam 160 feet high and 10,000 feet long. Its waters in turn will pause behind the Gavin's Point Dam, near Yankton, South Dakota, in a lake 37 miles long.

A casual reader whose life has never touched the lives of those who faced the prairie winds will weary of this picture of a series of mighty inland lakes dispensing waters from the mountains and the plains as the economy, the agriculture, and the commerce of the nation may dictate. But those who know the people that built the homes, the schools, the little white churches on the plains, and dared to hold out against drought and depressions, against social and economic change, will thank God for these bold moves which under his hand will furnish this "blest land of room enough" with even more room for happy living.

May one who for a quarter of a century lived and moved among these folks of the prairies and who for another thirty years has been unable to forget them, dream of the time when the great pumps driven by power engendered by the river itself will be sending ample streams through a narrow channel into Devils Lake to make it again the beautiful body of water it once was. The Cheyenne River might carry the surplus down into the Red River Valley or through the James River south across both Dakotas. What these

waters would mean along the James River when supplemented by similar surges of water from the Oahe reservoir in South Dakota, only those could foresee who loved to dream about life in sunshine states where life can be like trees planted by rivers of water.



## Chapter VII

### The Backdrop of the Western Sky

*Across the undulating plains the evening dusk has fallen,  
While low against its star-flecked sky a lonely campfire  
gleams;  
And beside the flick'ring fire, in the silence soft and  
brooding,  
A man is seeing visions, and a man is dreaming dreams.*

*And miles away the sunset light is fading into darkness,  
As a dusty prairie schooner halts, to give the horses rest;  
A tired woman lifts her eyes that glow with buoyant  
courage  
To glimpse the rugged mountains—the mountains of the  
West.*

(“The West,” by Catherine Parmenter)

What a backdrop for all that transpires to the east are the mighty Rocky Mountains! Who can ever tire of them as they lift out of dim horizons to greet the westbound traveler! But our backdrop is behind them to the west and in front of them

to the east—wherever the observer on the plains establishes his own horizon. Although many an urbanite—hurrying through the prairies on trans-continental train or in speeding automobile—glances out and sees only emptiness and forsakenness in the land, there is a glory there and a strange something!

An old man, a retired banker in north-central Iowa, having seen some word of mine in print, wrote forty years ago, "I was in the crew which made the survey for the Northern Pacific Railroad from Mandan to the mountains. There's no forgetting the short-grass country once it has got into your blood."

Walter Havighurst has an idea about the influence of wide spaces.

There is a stamp that a country puts upon men's faces and upon their speech, and, more mystically, upon their minds. Not by coincidence did Stefansson and Lindbergh, Garland and Turner and Veblen, come from the same great prairies above the Mississippi. Their work has an affinity which makes it a single contribution, repeated in their separate fields of adventure, in earth and air, in vision and in thought. Imagination and will were required of pioneers in that wilderness. It is no accident that the Middle Border produced men resolute and original, whose minds have started rivers of new thought that are enlarging still.

Prairie men, these all saw space in their youths and lived amid tasks bounded only by the horizon. They walked toward the sky. Later they had no fear of space—

not of blank miles of ice, not of blue oceans and blue air, not of spacious ideas that swing arcs of power over the slow thought-world of tradition. Like homestead seekers, they feared confinement more than hazard. There is a nostalgia that America knows for tasks that come only to a first generation and are not recoverable. But the wind still blows over the prairie where the grass bent under the wagon wheel and then sprang up again. And the prairie mind still holds the instincts of horizonland, impatient of boundaries, questing, impelled by an old need and led by purposes forever new.

*(The Upper Mississippi—A Wilderness Saga, by Walter Havighurst. New York: Farrar & Rinehart Inc., 1937)*

A city-centered life and culture may be quite impatient with such an opinion. But as the urbanite seats himself each evening to watch synthetic characters in some Western TV serial chase each other across the very attractive scenery, perhaps he is paying unconscious tribute to an opinion he has rejected.

While mass-produced rows of Cape Cod cottages and ranch-type mansions continue to push the suburban developments away from the hearts of our cities, there still are people—perhaps more than we realize—who know what the following poem is about:

MONTANA WIVES

Horizons

*I had to laugh,  
For when she said it we were sitting by the door,  
And straight down was the Fork  
Twisting and turning and gleaming in the sun.*

*And then your eyes carried across to the purple bench  
beyond the river  
With the Beartooth Mountains fairly screaming with  
light and blue and snow,  
And fold and turn of rimrock and prairie as far as your  
eye could go.  
And she says: "Dear Laura, sometimes I feel so sorry for  
you,  
Shut away from everything—eating out your heart with  
loneliness.  
When I think of my own full life I wish that you could  
share it.*

*Just pray for happier days to come and bear it."*

*She goes back to Billings to her white stucco house,  
And looks through net curtains at another white stucco  
house,  
And a brick house,  
And a yellow frame house,  
And six trimmed poplar trees,  
And little squares of shaved grass.*

*Oh, dear, she stared at me like I was daft.  
I couldn't help it! I just laughed and laughed!*

*(A Book of Songs, by Gwendolen Haste, New York:  
Coward McCann, 1930)*

Move your horizons eastward from the mountains to the open prairies, where there is room for many different circles of visibility, and you will find different but still appealing backdrops to the West.

Here is a picture etched on the memory of a new arrival in the Park River area of eastern North Dakota, as found in the memoirs of Carl

M. Grimstad ("Studies and Records, The Norwegian American Historical Association," Vol. 13, p. 7).

I shall never forget this late afternoon in October 1879. Before us was the most beautiful landscape I had ever seen. As we stood side by side gazing over the level luxuriant prairie untouched and unspoiled by the hands of men, the soft wind came down from the Northwest and gently caressed the tall grasses that grew there, and as they moved, their silvery sheen gave one the impression of an endless ocean of fertility. Here the broad acres were bounded only by faint, dark purplish timber lines on the north, the south and the west—the timber lines of the river systems. The West—the whole West—was just as the Indian and the buffalo had left it. The grandeur of the prairie, one vast expanse of solitude, made our hearts well up with gladness. Here, I thought, we shall dedicate our youthful years and our lives to tilling, toiling, and building.

My own horizons would be found across the state to the west, and strangely fascinating as a point of view is a farmyard gate looking toward the sunset across an unbroken expanse of fields, pastures, empty groves, prairie lakelets, unplowed grasslands. My feet used to take me to that gatepost again and again during occasional visits, just as my memory takes me now, to watch the glories in the western sky while the blue of the coming twilight and the dark crept up from behind. Just why my mind's eye should return to that particular view, I do not know. I say *mind* in this case,

for the horizons of *soul* and *spirit* lift higher and far beyond.

Perhaps those pilgrimages of memory are due to the kind hearts and gentle faces waiting in the little cottage beyond that farmyard gate. From the center of my horizon the eye lifts from knoll to knoll as far as unaided sight can reach and catches each knoll touched by rays of the declining sun, till the whole vast semicircle looks like a giant baking of mother's biscuits, each touched on top with golden brown and each one set off by the darker swales and the little inland ponds between.

Across the evening sky go the wild-fowl on their evening flights—sometimes flocks of mallards winging away to the grainfield which was their selection for the evening, then again a dozen teal whistling along from one slough to the next, sometimes a careless flock of crows flapping along in disorganized flight but definitely on the way to a mighty rendezvous of crows. Sometimes comes the sad night call of a lone drake who has lost his mate, seeking a place among the rushes where he can wait for the morning.

The sun drops lower; the shadows grow longer; the long, slanting rays of the sun half gone reach out as if to touch each hilltop with the caress of a benediction while the glory of God in a prairie sunset speaks to the listening heart.



THE SMILE OF GOD'S GOOD NIGHT

*October's golden, hazy day  
Drew to its calm and peaceful close,  
The fields in purpled glory lay  
As, huge and darkly red, the moon arose.  
One tiny star peeped through the blue,  
The goldenrods were wet with dew,  
And in the west a crimson light  
Shone—like the smile of God's good night.*

*Today November's wind-spiced clouds  
Have veiled the beauty of the skies,  
And like a pall the rain enshrouds  
That autumn grandeur I most prize.  
The flowers, that but so lately bloomed,  
Now, crushed and rain-drenched, lie entombed;  
But, still—a sunset rift of light  
Breaks—like the smile of God's good night.*

*And such is Life beneath His Care;  
Our busy days move swiftly by;  
In rain or shine, in foul or fair,  
His smile is ever hovering nigh.  
We live our lives in gladness, pain,  
In sweetness, sorrow, loss, and gain,  
Until our eyes, in glory-light,  
Close—to the smile of God's good night.*

By Rev. H. A. L. Hjermstad

## No Physician There

Around the shoulder of a butte rising high above the valley came a prairie schooner. The sun shot his diagonal rays squarely through the puckered opening of the canvas top into the eyes of a man and a woman and the little girl between them.

From afar the great lone hill had beckoned the plodding horses. Nothing intruded on the wide sweep of gently rising plain to limit the horizons that would be theirs from that hilltop, with the nearest cluster of cabins some thirty miles away.

This was Dogden Butte in the eighties. The Mouse River was far off to the north. Horse Shoe Valley stretched away to the south and west. In a gradual turn the wagon swung away from the sunset into a heavily wooded coulee, one of the deeper corrugations in the sides of this sentinel of the range of low hills stretching from southeast to

northwest across North Dakota. On a bench above a narrow valley where the grass lush and green proclaimed the presence of a spring, the wheel tracks ended. These two, like ten thousand other pairs of marks had come to the end—the site for a home, a homesteader's cabin.

The sentiments of a-thousand-and-one nights have been woven into music in a dreamy waltz song. What an American symphony it would be if someone should arise to catch, against the background music of the prairie wind in grass and trees, the plover's call, the nighthawk's melancholy "zoom," the coyote's good-night salute, the changing strains of hope and fear and glad expectation, the loyalty and love in those many hearts that have slept their last night in a covered wagon standing on the very sod which was to become home.

A simple house was soon under way, built from logs cut in the coulee. There must be mortar for the chimney and for weatherproofing between the logs and for whitewashing the interior. Limestone was at hand scattered over the prairie, and sand in the banks of the spring creek; but where was the kiln to turn the stones into quicklime?

A six-by-six-foot hole was dug. The bottom was covered with dry oak wood, the white limestone

was piled on it, then more dry wood surrounded and covered the stone. When the fire was blazing all was covered with sod and earth.

Late the second day the little limekiln was uncovered. Then came the processing and the accident. The burnt stone, still hot, was placed in the mortar-box and water brought from the spring. When the buckets were emptied and the whole mass agitated too carelessly the lime became "quicklime" indeed and in a little geyser of bubbles splashed a smear of the boiling mixture across the face of the builder and into his eyes.

A scream of pain brought his wife. A dash of spring water washed the torturing stuff away. She gently drew the resisting eyelids back to see what lay beneath for him, for her. White they were, like a seared egg, those eyeballs where sight had lived. Would he ever again see the wide prairies in the sunlight, the butte with its grass and trees, his tasks, his wife, the face of his little girl? What were his thoughts? What to do? Miles from anywhere, with a house unfinished and winter coming; his young wife, his child, his homestead, two horses, two colts, a dozen head of cattle—and he blind! He felt like screaming again. There was no physician there, not within fifty miles! What was there to do? The woman alone must do it. She washed the eyes gently with sweet cream cool from the spring

hole. Searching among remembrances and among meager resources, she took powdered alum and burned it, she scraped her child's writing slate for the smooth dust to be obtained there, then crushed a bit of sugar to dust and with a little funnel made from a sheet of writing paper blew the mixture into the blinded eyes.

The agony of decision is severe with the conscientious doctor. I am sure that there is often cold sweat on the hand of the surgeon under his sterilized rubber glove as he follows up a careful diagnosis with his surgical knife. The pen of an earnest physician will no doubt tremble a bit as he indicates the kind and the dosage of powerful medicines for a heart patient. But what of this lone woman in her cabin with a little daughter hanging to her skirts as she holds the funnel in her hand asking herself whether she dared to send on the breath of her lips that strange mixture into the eyes of her husband? She wavered, she backed away, she advanced again and finally into eyes that needed the tenderest attention of a specialist, went burnt alum, powdered sugar, and slate scrapings. God was good, and three days later faint images began to come through; his wife's face, his little child, the logs in the wall, sunlight on the cabin floor, crept back to his brain through healing eyeballs.

Years later I came to know this man well. He never complained about defective vision.

There was only one family of neighbors a mile away and a cluster of neighbors twenty-five or thirty miles away waiting for a railroad to come through. One day the near neighbor with his wife sitting on a board in a wagon drawn by a yoke of oxen was on the prairie some three miles from their home. A badger came into view which the driver felt impelled to kill. In the fracas the oxen took fright and ran away, overturning the wagon. After gathering together his oxen and his wagon, he looked for his wife and found her with a broken leg—broken just above the knee. He got her home and sent his boys for the neighbors.

Our little lady of Dogden Butte was again confronted with a major problem. No physician was there. She had never seen a fracture or the setting of a broken bone.

She ordered splints to be prepared. The injured woman's husband held the limb; the strong hands of her own husband furnished traction as she guided the broken leg bone back into place, then bound the splints in place. Again, after a day or two there came a scramble of neighbor boys at her door. The splints were loosening. Again she attended to her patient and all seemed well. Then came another appeal. The limb was swelling and



changing color, the pain was intense. She loosened the bindings on the splints and massaged gently and long. The husband's whispered questions: "Do you think the old woman will croak?" The circulation resumed. The patient recovered with no further incident.

There was another call to the same neighbor's house. Two of the boys got into a fight. One stabbed his brother in the chest. The victim was bleeding freely when the lady with the home remedies arrived. She stopped the bleeding with cornstarch and cotton batting and marveled that infection did not set in.

Settlers were arriving. Other cabins arose in the neighborhood. To one of them a young man came in a storm at midnight with both feet frozen. It was just before Christmas and storms raged for six solid weeks. In spite of all the neighbors could do there was no relief. Gangrene had set in. Other help must be found. The husband braved the stormy wastes — a long day's drive to Towner. There was, by then, a physician there. The little lady who had tried to help but couldn't, watched and prayed and waited.

Much more happened around the lone Butte, but these incidents will suffice to remind us of therapeutics practiced by our pioneers along the frontiers of the plains.

## Withered Souls

The glow of northern sunshine lurked in her golden hair. The freshness of Baltic springtime was in her face. A song as out of mountain waters lived in her heart. Echoes of church bells hid themselves in her soul. An unction from the Holy One enshrined her spirit.

In the May-time of life she came to America—she and her husband.

They made a home on the prairies. The glint of gentler sunlight in her hair bleached out under a merciless glare. Tints of rosebud and apple-bloom upon her cheeks turned rough red at the hands of winds, hot in summer and biting cold in winter.

The song in her heart might have stayed with her, for the prairies also know the music which the morning stars sang together, and they sing it

yet to those that are not deaf. But her ear attuned itself to the cackling of hens just off their busy nests, to the lowing of cows with udders full, to the lazy grunt of pigs ready for the packer's price; and she listened for a refrain to the barnyard medley in the jingle of coin in a purse and the rustle of currency in hand. The song in her soul was muted.

There were times when the echoes of old church bells made her restless, calling in answer to church bells here; just as a sleepy instinct in puddle ducks cries out to the wild mallards going over above. But the echoes grew dim and dimmer, until finally the comforting noises of the henhouse and cowshed stilled them forever.

The unction on her spirit, like unreplenished incense, vanished in a wisp of smoke and was gone.

No little child came to help save her soul.

Her chickens—she brooded over them; her sows—she mothered them; her cows—she could scarcely await the stroke of the clock when she might tear the steaming streams from their udders which meant cream and butter and cash.

She dreamed sometimes of the homeland and of a day when the house of God might see her again; when the chickens and the cows might not hold her.

Her body failed. The years collected their toll. She could no longer tend the chickens and feed the cows and slop the hogs and keep watch over all.

They took her to the city, away from her pens and her yards; but her heart stayed with its treasure. Life's centers were gone. Reason went too.

Early morning toilers hurrying to the factories glimpsed the furrowed face, wearing at once a haunted look and a vacant stare. Heavy shoes, a dirty shawl, tattered skirts, no touch of womanly pride was in this thing that tramped over vacant lots, across car tracks and curb, over pavement and gravel, a knotted willow stick in hand, looking here, looking there; then hastening back again to where the deeds and the mortgages and the cash were.

The evening shift would find her abroad again. She was mad—gently, harmlessly mad; restlessly, tirelessly, pathetically mad, as she tramped the city streets looking for those cows, those pesky straying cows; those cows always just ahead but never caught.

Day by day she fared forth; street and avenue were as broken pasture land; hedge and lilac but hiding places for her cows; she had lived for them, she would wear herself out for them; she must find them and drive them home before night.

*The golden hair became a little greasy twisted rope.  
The song in her bosom lay dead.  
Church bells had ceased to ring.  
The unction of the spirit had fled.  
She died one day, still looking for the cows.*

The husband, who had helped to kill her soul  
and the song in her heart, buried her body.

He had the deeds, and the notes, and the cash.

## The Shepherd of the Range

### *His Feet Are for Every Road*

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

Our shepherd is the Son of Man who knows no racial barriers, no geographical limitations.

His home was under Syrian skies. His race was Semitic. The Book which waited half complete for the fullness of time and him, is of the East.

But he walks among all men and takes them all to his heart. The people of every province can make him wholly their own and picture him in their own image.

Prejudice may judge him, contraband and bitterness hold him in exile; but his feet are for every road.

So we say, he is a Westerner too.

No child, by our so-saying, shall be robbed of



his sacred pictures, nor shall a single piece of church art be removed from its holy place. Singers of gentle old hymns may have their honor; writers of pastorals in prose shall not be denied; but it is time that the Lord my Shepherd comes West. People out there know sheep, and they need him.

We are accustomed to reading the Twenty-third Psalm like a lullaby. We illustrate it and illuminate it as though it were a dreambook, forgetting a shepherd's real struggles among wild crags and sucking torrents, barren lands, sheep-kill canyons, poison weeds, rattlesnakes, coyotes, blasting south winds and terrible blizzards of the north when death on his white horses gallops down the wind.

We forget the loneliness, the patient toil, the aching care, the blooddrops on the trail of the Shepherd.

Artists have toyed with this Psalm for two thousand years. They have made park paths out of canyon trails. The brush and briers of sunburned Judean uplands have become primped-up shrubbery along a bridle path. Sparse bunchgrass of the range has become a dew-drenched stand of clover that would give a goat the bloats.

When the grimness of life and the realities of redemption have been glossed over and poetically padded, what does Psalm 23 mean to a Montana

ranch wife looking from her sun-blistered doorway far across the range where stark, staring hardship leers at her menfolks and their sheep from every point on the horizon?

Just what does the picture of my Lord the Shepherd walking along garden paths mean to the lone herder on a Wyoming hillside, as he beds down his thousand sheep and his own soul for the hours of darkness, with the prairie wolves sounding their antiphonal plaints across the night?

We are supposed to be the sheep in the picture. "All we like sheep are gone astray."

The painters make fuzzy lambs out of us, white as a perfumed Pekinese fresh from a lady's lap. There are ewes, placid ewes of concentrated attention, following him down the path by the cropped shrubbery; but where are the ewes with burrs and thistles in their wool from being where they ought not to have been? Where those with muddied flanks from wading in the mire they should have avoided? Where are the bleeding, stomping, biting, fighting ewes? Yes, even the ewes that disown their own lambs?

What has become of the rams in that procession down the garden path? The crook-horned, butting, blatting, rebellious rams? Look hard and sometimes you will find one. There should be more.

My Lord the Shepherd surrounded himself first of all with a band of men. Twelve of them, seventy of them, and who knows how many more.

And the Shepherd! In storied work we deck him out like one made for morning walks on fresh-sprayed lawns and for dallying with flowers. Is it so, that the sheepherder goes to meet what he must meet when the winter dawn comes up across Bare Butte? Is it so Christ redeems our lives from destruction now?

Little children in city churches may keep their Shepherd and tell about the "soft green pastures he discloses"; but the Son of Man came also for slope-country nesters and benchland ranchers. Sheep tenders at evening in the mysterious quiet that creeps from ridge to ridge need One who can come close to them in their lonesome life, One they too can understand. They are shepherds themselves.

*Green Pastures in the Dust Bowl*

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."

What are you going to do for the sheep when last year's dead tufts of grass are all there are; when upland ranges never turn green with May; when fire riding down the wind leaves miles and miles of range black as the pit of a coal mine?

Those are hard days for the shepherd. But it is up to him to find a way. Sheep look to their shepherd even when they are not fed.

The land policies that despoiled the Great Plains are not to be laid at the door of my Lord the Shepherd. Homestead laws, railroad land sales, wartime cries for wheat with dust bowl consequences—these are not to be debited to the Lord.

Has my Shepherd, then, nothing for the careworn wife who has put her hand in the hand of her man to offer her very life in the building of a prairie home? Is he silent toward the huddling group which finally packs a few pieces of scarred furniture in an improvised trailer and with no backward glance drives away from twenty-five years of blasted endeavor?

My Lord the Shepherd has watched that little homestead on prairie knoll, and has known the heartaches of its unequal struggle. His eye is on the westward trail, the roadside bivouac, the trailer camps, and the shack towns of the Pacific slope where these brave but baffled souls are tarrying. He expects, I think, the churches whose children these are to watch with him the trails and the depleted settlements from which they have turned westward a second time.

There are green pastures even in what some so hastily have called the "dust bowl"; and the Bible

in the hands of devout parents in a trailer camp can be just as rich in guidance and blessing as it was to their grandparents resting at evening beside their covered wagon.

There have been hard years for many Westerners. Life is like that every year for a majority of people on this round earth. David and the herdsmen of Judah could not promise their sheep lush alfalfa. Sheep range is not like that. It is often mostly shad-scale and brush and Russian thistle. God has nowhere promised us life with all modern conveniences perpetually guaranteed.

But for the sheep of the range there are sometimes mountain parks, like oases among the trees, abundant with grass and flowers; peaceful and full of fatness. For others there are the little valleys under the breaks where alluvial soil and underground moisture make a very paradise of green in the shimmering heat. And over the short-grass hills that mystery of stored vitamins, the buffalo grass, curls itself up in midsummer and waits with its sun-cured riches. The sheep come by even in dead of winter, and paw the snow away to eat and lie down in great content, knowing no want. When winter comes, blasting the hope for late blooming flowers, it is still a time to trust God.

There is an open range for *souls* to which my Shepherd leads, where no one is denied. Its out-

look and its values do not depend on one's ability to say, concerning this thing or that piece of ground, "It is mine." It is the high land of souls redeemed, who know God. It is a wide range, for life there is lived under the horizons of eternity. The Word is the light of its paths. Baptism is a perennial spring in every generation. The Eucharist is a constant mystery of communion between very God and men. His truth abides there for strong and weak, for poor and rich. That Word is not just a summary of yesterday's experience and a guess at tomorrow's development; it is God's eternal law and everlasting Gospel.

Those whose souls live there—no matter what their bodies wear—breathe the air of honesty, purity, truth, love. They learn patience, frugality, contentment, helpfulness, self-control. Possessing their souls in Christ's grace and patience, wherever they may be there is a garden, even in the midst of a dust bowl.

### *God's Waterholes*

"He leadeth me beside the still waters."

Some great ranches have mountain streams rushing and singing through their pastures. Most Westerners cannot ask for a nearby lake or for a mighty



river past their doors; but water, water there must be.

Waterholes have often been the very life of the herd or the flock. See the deep stock trails with a band of sheep smoking down the draws to water, and the meaning of the waterhole on the range will appear.

Follow those trails away from water for miles. There skulls, dried bones or a shriveled hide will tell the story of stock that strayed too far from water and perhaps drank from a stagnant sink. On that back trail away from the waterhole you will understand better the import of the Savior's words when he speaks of the water of life. "Whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst."

One vivid memory lingers of a horse-drawn stage and a 45-mile trip under an angry August sun, with just one place on that trail to get a safe drink of water.

The waterhole is not always like the one made famous in Remington's painting. Often it is a deep pool gouged out of the channel of an almost dry stream at a spot where hidden gravel beds give up their cool treasure. Or it may be a wet place in the sand; or water backed up behind an earthen dam, or caught and held in a natural depression.

Bulls came bellowing down to the waterholes

Great herds, hoofs and horns cracking and snapping, came down in clouds of dust fighting flies, stomping into the borders of the pool muck and mire but drinking, drinking, drinking; for water means life.

Sometimes in the old days the lone rider came, with swollen lips and tortured tongue, canteen empty, to throw himself down and blow the scum away from some mean hole to drink. Water meant life.

My Lord the Shepherd has the water of life to give and he leads us to it. It may be found in quiet, vineclad churches under the village elms; in the white sanctuaries crowning so many rural hills to which the folks come from miles around to "meetin'," or in any place where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name. Yes, even one lone woman found it at a well, though she had come to carry water for her kitchen.

There is as yet in our land no lack of opportunity to hear the Word of the Lord. But 'tis a dry and thirsty land for the soul that walks wide of these opportunities.

Think by way of a parable of the trails up along far slopes with the withered hides and bleached bones of cattle that stayed too far away from good water for too long. For them the vultures waited.

There are many unseen spiritual tragedies, where men and women have stayed too far away from the water of life for too long. The Good Shepherd says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

On the range as along the way of human life there are waterholes of death. There is bitter, poisonous water in miry spots where sucking, clinging death awaits in the muck; there are mirages, dream pictures on the horizon that promise water where there is none. My Lord the Shepherd has warned us against the poisonous springs and against dreams and broken cisterns that hold no help.

### *Death Haunts the Flock*

"He restoreth my soul."

David's words suggest rest and recreation rather than redemption. But even rest for the soul requires, first of all, redemption.

Death does haunt humanity in an effort to drive men forever away from their true relation with God. Death haunts even those who are enfolded under the Shepherd's care.

It did not take the hosts of darkness and of evil

long to discover the Good Shepherd standing out there in the fullness of time—*with* mankind, *for* mankind, *instead* of mankind—its David in the conflict with evil. Had he been a hireling instead of the true herdsman of our souls, he would have fled.

The evil hosts found him; they began to encircle him, to mill around him. He was like a herder afoot among cattle. They were men, learned scribes and cunning Sadducees, priests and princes. You can find them in the Gospel stories ringing him around like wild cattle of the plains with their pawing bulls.

It was so written of him long ago (Psalm 22): "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths as a ravening and a roaring lion. For dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."

"How strange a mixture of metaphors," says that reader who does not know the Good Shepherd and how he laid down his life for the sheep. The bulls become wolves, the wolves become men; the place they surrounded him was Calvary and the cross. He died there for me. Only he could

restore my soul, having redeemed me from destruction.

*The One-Name Trail*

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness  
for his name’s sake.”

A band of two or three thousand sheep feeding across a sagebrush flat are not much concerned with direction; they move here and there as they list. Feed, water, and bed-ground are the only directions heeded. The same band, threading the boulders of a gorge on the way to summer pastures well up toward timberline, or again being hurried from the heights with the first big snow of winter just behind them, have much to do with trails. Up the canyon or down the canyon there is likely to be just one trail. It is important to find it and to stay on it.

Human beings have to do with trails. There are two—a wide one down which it is so easy to drift, and a canyon road that leads finally up onto the wide plains of peace.

But before peace there must be righteousness. That is why we name the road upward the One-Name Trail. The Lord our Righteousness is the Prince of Peace. That trail was made when he climbed Calvary with the cross bumping along

behind, scratching a mark over the rocks and through the gravel. That scratch in the gravel and over the stones has become the highway for souls. It still marks the One-Name Trail. There the Shepherd still walks, calling all to trust the "one name given among men whereby we must be saved."

The path of righteousness is a path to the highlands, to a wide and glorious place for a man to be.

I don't know whether sheep enjoy scenery. The mountain goats evidently do as they stand perched two or three thousand feet up over a precipice; and the range horses silhouetted on some high butte against the evening sky must see something from their vantage point.

But for man! How the soul does expand when the Shepherd has succeeded for his name's sake in leading one up the path of righteousness and on to the nearer sweep of the plains of peace and liberty and eternal hope. Let no one whimper about the straight gate and the narrow trail. Think of the highlands of God and the joy of Christian living!

Please, in considering the depths below and the heights above, do not talk about the evolution of man's religion and the unfolding of his latent capacities through the ages. God did it. For his name's sake he established the path of righteousness and will set your feet upon it.



*The Beckoning Canyon*

"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

In boyhood I came upon the story of an Indian myth concerning the Grand Canyon and the strange fascination of that abyss with the quick death. To "Those Below" were ascribed a strange magnetism that would draw first the eye and then the body hurtling down.

The rimrock of eternity does beckon. How often we have stood like sheep walking in the dark on its very brink and are back here again for a while because a sustaining hand has kept us, no one can say how.

As for the ceaseless care of the Shepherd over souls of gamboling lambs and gadding ewes and philandering rams who crane their necks over the edge of a moral precipice, making eyes at "Those Below"—not even the guardian angels of us all know the full measure of his faithfulness.

Those who seek their safety against physical death and against lurking death eternal in giving careful heed to his pierced hand, gesturing right or left, to the path marked by the Shepherd's wounded feet, to the opened road through Joseph's tomb, they indeed will need to fear no evil.

There is a rod. There is a staff. Rods and staves are hard, unbending. They may bruise and wound and break. Against rebellious love of wickedness and persistent service of iniquity, that rod will one day be a rod of iron in judgment.

But a shepherd's rod will guide gently and his staff is a symbol of protection. So now the Word of my Lord in law and in Gospel—they comfort me.

*Wolves in the Purple Sage*

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

The herder has a long day. Even at noon, in midsummer heat by the waterhole, he dares not go visiting, for the sly coyote waits in the sagebrush at the edge of the coulee for some foolish sheep to wander away.

While his flock grazes in the early dawn or toward sundown the herdsman must keep an eye out for straggling bunches that may lose themselves only to become meat for coyote or wolf, after which the flitting shadows of the western plains will sit and yodel to one another from hill to hill.

Sheep have many enemies. The safety of the

band lies with the shepherd. The flock is his first care.

God's children, too, can look up and be fed, even though there may be many enemies.

Life is not a continuous banquet on a screened porch where mosquitoes are the only disturbing element.

Old concepts of "struggle for existence" and "survival of the fittest" abide as realities even though the Darwinism which made them slogans is passing.

Microscopic enemies, parasitical enemies, insect enemies, black rust, flaxwilt, grasshoppers, destruction by hail and wind and drought, and anthrax and black leg—these dangers plague the sheep. Grafters and racketeers, cheap politicians and cattle thieves and industrial royalists, sneak thieves and treacherous neighbors—these conspire to destroy security and plenty for men. We do feed in the presence of enemies.

Every altar and sanctuary where God's spiritual children are nourished is surrounded by enemies just as the sheep cropping short grass up the slope of a butte may have a dozen coyotes watching, each in its bush.

The Shepherd who is my Lord has redeemed me. He can keep his flock and nurture them and cause them to increase, to live and die victoriously

even though the world is filled with devils or at least with their active and aggressive agents.

Yes, the coyote is in the sagebrush, the eagle is in the sentinel pine, the timber wolf is over the ridge, the bobcat on his overhanging bough; but the shepherd keeps his watch.

*A Backward and a Forward Look*

“Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”

The last two verses of the Shepherd's Psalm present a comforting picture. But can a person sit down and repeat these lines before his Thanksgiving Day dinner of sheep-meat stew and egg-sized potatoes, stringy carrots, and mangy cabbage; after a spring and summer spent in a hard battle that brought a three-bushel crop of wheat and a few stacks of hay well mixed with Russian thistle and a pile of corn fodder just enough to see the stock through winter—or none at all?

Two of the happiest people I have known lived in a little cottage under a hill, dependent on pastures with a 45-degree pitch and on a bit of field

where one reasonable crop in eight would be a fair average. Yet they have gone their smiling way in and out of the valley for thirty years, with thankfulness to God and good will toward men in their hearts.

Today with the heavenly Father removed from the immediate needs of each individual by two or three manufacturing processes and three or four middlemen's profits, perhaps the overflowing cup for most folks of the future will have to be tied up with legislation.

There is as yet, however, ample room for demonstrating the sound economic advice of the Scriptural precept, "Godliness with contentment is great gain."

The Christian may look up clear through the ethereal belt that carries the radio waves and beams, ceaselessly telling of shaving creams and soups, of automobiles and cosmetics, of new and old deals, of wars, of banditry, of confiscation, of revolt, of bull and bear markets, and he can still say, "Thou, O Lord, my soul's Shepherd—thou art above them all, kings and congresses, dictators and boards of directors, CIO and AAC's. Thou art above them, and almighty. Goodness and mercy shall follow me through all the days of my life. For thine eye follows even a single sheep."

*The Crossing*

"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Sheep are pitifully helpless in fast water. The shepherd must find a crossing where the blue waters fan out to ripple across wide gravel bars.

It is so far from here to there! A dark, swift stream lies between. No, it is not a mere stream. It is a veritable ocean. Who will find the easy passage? There are no shallow, easy fords.

Even standing in the friendly quiet of western hills at dusk when God seems near and the sordid congestions of human living far away, there is nothing visible on any horizon to give guarantee to the bold assurance, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

But the Shepherd has a way. He is the way. By him we can come to the Father and to the Father's house.

With a band of sheep at the ford it is a matter of getting one or two across, and then the rest will come as a band. It is not so with death and life. One by one we cross, and one by one make our entrance into the heavenly kingdom. One by one the Shepherd will know his own and confess them by name in the presence of the Father and the holy angels.



*The Herder and His Sheep*

“The Lord is my shepherd.”

Who would ever want to be a sheepherder? The “Limited” flies by, and from its air-cooled Pullmans the transcontinental tourist looks out with disdain that is half pity upon a lonely figure against the sky. There is a dog and a canvas-topped wagon with a sheet-metal stovepipe sticking out. Below on a gumbo flat are the thousand or so sheep—half a hundred black ones, the rest a dirty yellow-brown. Sadly the traveler thinks of all the Western stories he has read. All of them agree in their feeling of aloofness from the sheepherder.

The cattlemen of the old days hated the herder and made war on him, sometimes bringing death to him and his charges.

The new cowboy from the dude ranch privately decked out in catalog-house chaps and spurs, rides by with squeaking leather, scorning the herder.

My Shepherd, too, was despised and rejected of men. Seeing the flock of needy souls around him, the upper class said, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” Even in a house of death they laughed him to scorn.

Why should he ever want to be a sheepherder? It was because of his compassion, his love, his God-head—for God himself is love.

Sheep are so helpless! Not only must the herder watch them at their birth, help the mother to know its lamb, feed the "bummer" lambs, lift the stumbling, carry the weak ones; but the burden of the whole band is upon him.

Every day, every hour, through the darkness of the night, he must be ready.

Battling rams must be checked lest one or both be battered to death. Strong, full-grown sheep roll over on their backs and lie helpless, pawing the air till they bloat and die. Infected wounds, blow-flies, ticks, maggots—all are the shepherd's care. Sheep are easily bewildered, frightened, scattered. A lamb twelve steps from his mother is lost. Fog in a deadly mantle of mist lays itself across the band and destroys its sense of unity and security. The sheep, in little clusters, wander away and are lost. No shepherd sleeps by day or by night when clouds come down to lay themselves along the land.

Winter comes with driving snow. One drift may easily be the burial mound of a score of floundering ewes.

There is spring with its slush and ice and mud holes, with streams in flood and hungry sheep chasing the hope of greener grass over every hill.

There is the summer with its heat, lightning, hails, and wind over the open prairie. Then comes the chill of autumn.

The good shepherd faces it all.

My Lord the Shepherd, too, must carry each lamb in his arms. Upon his back was laid the burden of the whole world of men and their sins; and on his heart, their helplessness.

Every day, every hour, endlessly, the Lord our Shepherd keeps his vigil over our souls and bodies, over our doubts and fears. Once he cried out, "O faithless and perverse generation! how long shall I be with you and suffer you?" But he keeps right on being a herder.

Sheep are so foolish!

Where, I wonder, had that one been gamboling which the prophet saw when all that could be found was two legs and a piece of an ear?

Westerners tell of a flock going down a trail that circled on solid ground around a mud hole; but one sheep up ahead slipped into the muck and wallowed through, and so every sheep to come followed the leader through the mud. Why does the Bible liken us to sheep? In Scotland they tell of herdsmen bringing their charges down a narrow path and then holding a staff across the path to compel the leader and two or three other sheep to jump the obstacle. The staff is then withdrawn, but all the rest of the flock at that exact spot hop over an imaginary barrier. How the Scotch shepherds must laugh! Does our Shepherd smile now

as he sees us jumping, jumping over an imaginary rod held by Dame Fashion above the cross-trails of human living?

But how saddened his face must be to see the sheep of his flock floundering in the mud of some questionable current mode, rather than go safely by on the path of righteousness!

Can my Lord the Shepherd hold the West?

They say that stockmen and combine farmers are persons of such large affairs that they cannot be expected to bother with the little churches of the plains and foothills, where neither music nor architecture can be very impressive.

The West is a man's country and our Lord Christ must have men to hold a place there.

This is not to forget the women who rode the covered wagons, who made homes in sod shanties and ranch houses of bleached cottonwood logs, who held on to God and the right, though rowdyism rode the trails and drunkenness claimed every holiday.

Yet the wide sweep of the plains will be a man's job. Plains need men; plains draw men and hold them.

Can my Lord the Shepherd be a Westerner and really grip men and hold them? Strong men, able men, men of power? If we could only see out of the past that host of men who one by one have

been stopped in their tracks by what Jesus is, what he has done, what he requires, we would have our answer. We see Simon the fisherman, rugged son of Jonas, impulsive, a leader always, submitting thankfully to the quiet magnetism of the Preacher who asked to use his boat for a pulpit.

There are the Roman army officers of Gospel history. They had only casual meetings with him; yet we hear Pilate's "Behold the man!" and the centurion's, "Verily this was a righteous man—truly this was the Son of God."

There was Nicodemus, prejudiced against him by all his social and religious associations, who came for an evening interview and opened by saying, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God."

There was Saul of Tarsus, a Jew by birth and religion, a Greek also in culture. He glorified his life and his name by living up to his own pledge, "I am the slave of Jesus Christ."

Tragedy has come to many a Western home because a man could run his sheep all right—thousands of them—but could not run himself. The victim of a sinful habit like gambling, drinking, carousing, becomes a pitifully shrunken and defeated thing, though large talk and a broad-brimmed hat may try to hide it.

Just how impressive will a breezy Western per-

sonality be when a man comes away from pens and gates, shipping yards and stock tallies, into the presence of God? When the Almighty checks in his flock for eternity, knowing the Shepherd will be what counts?

Plainsmen are at an advantage. They can get a line on themselves and on life which city dwellers often miss.

A sheep-tender in the hill country long since left these words: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

When a man begins to talk like that to himself he gives the Savior a good opening.

In David's case the Spirit led on until the Shepherd Psalm took form in his heart.

But my Lord the Shepherd is a Westerner too!  
O Lord Christ, get and hold the West! Amen.



## God's Sons Go West

There is a final chapter for those who have faced the west winds through a long life. The directions remain the same, but the winds have changed. Whether gently whispering a promise of continued earthly joy, or hurling into one's face a fevered heat or a blizzard chill as of impending death, those air currents have lost their dominant force. Instead:

*Every westward blowing wind,  
Is my wind . . .*

a stirring of life's atmosphere—akin to Tennyson's:

*Such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.*

Sunset seems to be in the poet's face as he looked toward the crossing of the harbor bar, so

perhaps we may be permitted to think Westward in the last chapter.

Perhaps only a person who has lived with the sorrows of World War I and its soldier talk would choose the West Winds for a theme; but many thoughts are mingled in its choice. Years ago a reading of the Egyptian "Book of the Dead" revealed this phrase which was a constant refrain in the funeral lamentations of ancient Egypt:

*To the West, to the West,  
O Chief, as thou goest to the West,  
The gods themselves lament as thou  
goest to the West.*

The concept was not exclusively Egyptian.

In an article ("War Finds Its Way to the Gilbert Islands") in the *National Geographic Magazine* for January 1943, Sir Arthur Grimble says, "Two things assist a departing soul—the manner in which he is buried and the tattooing which his body bears. . . . The dead must be buried with feet to westward, so that when the soul stands up out of the grave, it may walk straight forward to the western horizon. There the ancestral shades wait to welcome and guide it to the happy land beyond the world's western edge."

I never learned just where our soldiers in the muddy, bloody trenches of France and Flanders picked up that gentle phrase for the warrior's

death—"going West." Perhaps some soldier-scholar remembered his studies of ancient Egypt. War grasps and crushes to its use every kind of gift and ability.

I have rather felt that as the homes these soldiers longed to return to lay west of Europe's battlefields and west across the threatening war-time Atlantic, so their homesickness and their hope for the Father's "house of many mansions" were combined in that expression, "Going West," after the manner of the old Scotch hymn:

*I am far frae my hame  
And I'm lonely aften whiles  
For the longed for hame-bringing  
And the Father's welcome smiles.*

The expression endeared itself to me, for all through my boyhood's years "going home" was always going toward the sunset. Coming from country school, from church, from academy, from town, from the railway stations—always home awaited to the West. Tall poplar and cottonwood trees sent their shadows out to meet me. The westward sinking sun was so often in my face and "home" was bathed in its slanting rays!

The welcoming smiles that were there, the love and fellowship in home tasks, the peace, the security there have intertwined their memories with the realities of our hope in Christ until the "west-

ward blowing wind is my wind," and the way there is the way of peace.

We must beware here of mysticism, pagan and non-pagan, rooted in mere sentiment. There are realities, grim realities here.

*Oh, God! It is a fearful thing  
To see the human soul take wing  
In any shape, in any mood.*

"The Prisoner of Chillon,"  
by Lord Byron

"Death is an unsurveyed land, an unarranged science. Poetry draws near Death only to hover over it for a moment and withdraw in terror. History knows it only as a universal fact. Philosophy finds it among the mysteries of being, the one great mystery of 'being not.' All contributions to this dread theme are marked by an essential vagueness, and every avenue of approach seems darkened by impenetrable shadow" (F. W. Faber).

One does not deride the songs of noble sentiment when they boast of human affection as though it could triumph over death. The love of a man for a woman is indeed a noble matter, but except as translated by the touch of Jesus Christ it boasts in vain of its intentions:

"I love thee—

I love but thee to all eternity," says Grieg's great love song.

It was an awesome experience to hear Schumann-Heink, after war had taken her several sons, singing "The Cry of Rachel" by Mary Salter Turner (words by Lisette Woodworth Reese):

*Death, let me in!  
I that was rich, do ask for alms,  
Death, let me in!  
I that was full, uplift empty palms;  
Death, let me in!  
Are you grown so deaf that you cannot hear?  
Death, let me in!  
I will call so loud, I will cry so sore,  
You must in pity come open the door,  
Death, let me in!*

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Mother-love is wonderful, but it has no dominion, no power to help or to save in that other land to which we are going

God is there. He will know. He will remember. He will ask. His word will be opened before the judgment seat. How do we dare go? Where is the gladness of a homecoming?

Homecoming is for children who know the Father and the Father's house. We speak of "God's sons" and the westward journey. The word is used here in that wide, wide sexless sense which John in his First Epistle gives us: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." The Apostle reaches up and out in his concept, for he contin-

ues, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1, 2).

It is apparent that the Spirit has taken the apostolic writer across the border, from the now to then, from here to there, and that the sonship of which he speaks endures.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God." As that is true, there simply cannot be emptiness and nothingness and night when the tenant steps out of this present tabernacle. Because God is God and sonship is participation in his divine nature, there must be a door, a pathway, a glory of eternal hope toward the westward horizon even though chill darkness from the east creeps over the land.

How are we the sons of God? God so loved this world of sinful men that he gave his Son "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish." It is the Father's love that names us "sons." It was his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who fixed it for us. It is the Holy Spirit who invites, enlightens, separates us so that it becomes true. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ."

But the inquisitor asks again, "How can sons, even such sons, go unafraid toward the realities of death and the judgment?"

"The sting of death is sin; and the strength of



sin is the law." These are realities undenied. "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Christ Jesus." This too is reality.

Let no one say, then, that our hopes of immortality are checks drawn on the uncertainties of the unknown.

"There is news from death's dark portal"; so our fathers, with their Norse hymnbooks in hand, used to sing at Easter. Death had no grip on Jesus Christ, and could not hold him. He died under the burden of our sins. He arose to declare us free. Living in him, dying in him, death has no hold on us. His mercy is our boast against judgment; his advocacy our refuge in the great day of the omniscient. It is not an accident that the great central creed of all Christendom ends, "I believe in . . . the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." They go together. They belong together.

The vastnesses of the beyond out there over the horizons do promise a lonesome road for the soul to go. But I rather revel in the word that is coming back now from the many explorers of space. Those reports tie up so closely to the beginnings described in the first verses of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and

darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." It was God's world then. It is still God's universe.

Thought and memory and love are not barred nor confined by time or space. Thought has no trouble following the telescope's reflections to the farthest galaxy of the Milky Way. His children will not lose their Father in the vastness of this beyond.

So we await "a light, a glory in the western sky," convinced with the Apostle: "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:34-39).





## About the Author

Thaddeus F. Gullixson has written this book to keep alive remembrance of a generation of pioneers, who, trusting God, went toward the West to build. Out of their relentless toil, frugality, self-reliance, and neighborly helpfulness there sprang up homes, communities, and churches which made for them a good life and opened up to their children a far better lot than their own.

Dr. Gullixson's own life has been deeply rooted in the venture he writes about. In the fall of 1865 Andrew and Anna Gullixson crossed the Mississippi River just below Dubuque, Iowa, in a covered wagon, headed north and west, and settled on a new homestead in the Des Moines River Valley. Thaddeus, their youngest child, was born on the homestead Sept. 4, 1882.

As a young man he attended Luther College, Decorah, Iowa; then Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. He was ordained to the ministry in 1907 and called to a parish at Pierre, S.D. There he served the new crop of homesteaders moving into the Standing Rock Reservation west of the Missouri River. After four years, he was called to a parish in Minot, N.D., again finding himself in close contact with the pioneer venture. He served in this community for 19 years, and was then named president of Luther Theological Seminary. He served in this capacity from 1930 until retirement in 1954.

Dr. Gullixson also is the author of the Augsburg books, "Christus Emptor," "Christ for a World Like This," and "The Valley Waits." He has honorary doctor's degrees from St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn., and from Capital University, Columbus, Ohio.

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In the face of the west wind.

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